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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 HANOI 000899

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: Internal CPV directive warns of U.S.-led "peaceful evolution," provides insights into hardliners' thinking

REF: HANOI 820, HANOI 330, HANOI 809, HANOI 537, HCMC 606

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CLASSIFIED BY: Virginia Palmer, Charge D'Affaires; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

11. (C) SUMMARY: An internal CPV directive briefly posted online warns that "hostile forces" are infiltrating Vietnamese society and threaten to destroy Vietnam's socialist system. USG-sponsored programs in education and governance, and organizations such as USAID, Peace Corps, and Fulbright, are listed by name and cited as "threats" to Vietnam. Penned by the Party's Propaganda and Education Commission, Decision 34-CT/CW offers a cautionary reminder that important elements in Vietnam's Party/state apparatus remain deeply suspicious of U.S. intentions. In terms of internal politics, the Decision also reflects a growing elite-level divide between the traditionally influential Central Committee commissions and those associated with PM Dung who seek to shift more power to the government. The rhetoric, tone, and intent of Decision 34 closely resembles those associated with the televised "confessions" of Le Cong Dinh (ref A). Infuriating, to be sure -- but there is also less here than meets the eye: broadsides such as these are not uncommon, particularly in the run-up to a Party Congress. In some instances -- the treatment of international NGOs -- Decree 34 is considerably less strident than previous documents. Despite the decree, the bilateral relationship continues to expand across a broad range of issues. Our challenge is to continue to push the relationship forward, consistent with our interests and values, mindful that some U.S. initiatives will continue to be met with deep suspicion or outright hostility by some within the Party base and leadership. END SUMMARY.

ACCIDENTAL TRANSPARENCY

12. (C) Decision (or Decree) 34-CT/CW was drafted by the CPV's committee on ideology headed by Vietnam's newest Politburo member To Huy Rua and formally approved for issuance to all party units by the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the CPV headed by Politburo member and CPV Standing Secretary Truong Tan Sang on April 24, 2009. It is an internal document that conveys official guidance to all CPV members and units. A small provincial Communist Party newsletter posted the Decree on its website, apparently by mistake, and removed it shortly after it appeared, but not before several bloggers had circulated and commented on it. It is an open secret that the CPV's propaganda apparatus has for

years produced internal party documents of this sort, instructing Party members to exercise extreme caution in their interactions with U.S. programs and Mission Vietnam personnel and that the rhetoric typically heats up in advance of a Party Congress. These documents reflect more public, official statements about the threats posed by U.S.-led efforts at "peaceful evolution" and, more recently, "self-evolution" (ref. B), but provide more specific "guidance" for Party cells. Courtesy of a clerk's error, we have the document in hand.

BEWARE HOSTILE FORCES -- PARTICULARLY THE USG

13. (SBU) Decision 34-CT/CW's preamble reviews efforts by the Party to combat "peaceful evolution," citing a 1998 Politburo resolution, resolutions from the 2001 Party Congress, and Central Committee Decisions 94-CT/TW (2002), which established a special interagency "steering committee" on the issue, and 05-CT/TW (2006). Despite these efforts, "hostile forces" have intensified their "ideological and cultural conspiracies and plots." The preamble devotes its strongest language to criticizing the very serious ideological "debasement" affecting "not a small segment" of CPV Cadre: "self-evolution." But the critique is also directed outward, at conspiracies to promote "political pluralism" and "a multi-party system." The document states that these "hostile forces" not only intend to "wipe out the socialist regime" but also "Vietnamese cultural identity."

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14. (SBU) In its discussion of external enemies, the ten-page document cites specific organizations. In every case where a specific culprit is identified, it is the USG. The Peace Corps, for example, is described as an organization that specializes in overthrowing governments, while the USAID governance assessment is cited as proof that the United States aims to promote a "color revolution" in Vietnam. Fulbright and Vietnam Education Foundation are elements of a U.S.-sponsored "human strategy" to train a "U.S. and Western-oriented" core group to "transform" Vietnam. The United States is described as "frantically" establishing American Corners in Vietnam "to promote American images of lifestyles for youth." Most conspiratorially perhaps, the document refers to a "four-step roadmap" culminating in efforts to encourage U.S. universities to "open institutions in Vietnam."

15. (SBU) The sections on media and religion are more scatter-shot and do not target U.S. programs, but the language is equally paranoid. "Hostile forces," for example, are described as implementing "wicked schemes" to brainwash "free-thinking" reporters into practicing an overly critical brand of "Western-style journalism." Decision 34 criticizes land-use protests by Catholic parishioners in Hanoi and Quang Tri province and condemns "reactionaries and religious fanatics" as plotting to form a "religious coalition to oppose Communism." The development of "abnormal Protestantism" and other "strange religions" in ethnic minority areas in the Northwest Highlands is blamed for spreading discord.

INTERNATIONAL NGOS TREATED WITH KID GLOVES

16. (SBU) International NGOs come in for surprisingly light treatment. Decision 34 refers, almost as an afterthought, to "hostile forces" that use INGOs to further their (the hostile forces') own "political end." Previous internal documents of this

type have been much more strident and much more specific in naming individual NGOs, according to one contact who has been involved intensively in NGO work and legal reform in Vietnam for more than fifteen years. No NGOs are mentioned by name. While the document mentions plots to "establish contacts, recruit, have agents infiltrate organizations and collect information while they propagandize and popularize Western-style democracy and human rights," the document ties this to activities in ethnic minority areas only and specifically states that this is only true of a subset of the 550 international NGOs active in Vietnam.

"SELF-EVOLUTION" (AGAIN)

¶7. (SBU) After enumerating the plots of "hostile forces," the final six pages of Decision 34 review efforts within the party to ensure ideological rectitude, assesses the impact within the CPV itself, and presents "guiding opinions, tasks, and essential solutions" for all party members and units to combat the threats enumerated above. Most of the instructions are vague calls for increased control and vigilance over organizations susceptible to influence by "hostile forces" such as the press. Party organs dealing with culture and arts likewise should "encourage works of art with good content and prohibit those with deviant viewpoints." The document concludes with a list of ten instructions ("essential solutions and task") directing CPV members to intensify ideological education and "learn from the example of Ho Chi Minh, more effectively counter "hostile viewpoints," and improve outreach, including to overseas Vietnamese. Interestingly, the list includes calls to combat corruption and improve the efficiency of government operations in order to undercut the arguments of those who

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criticize the CPV and GVN. In contrast to the preamble and first sections, the call to action is almost entirely inward-looking and does not mention any U.S. or Western organizations.

AT HEART, IT'S INTERNAL PARTY POLITICS

¶8. (C) There is, of course, an irony here. Top GVN/CPV leaders have repeatedly and publicly asked for many of the programs that Decision 34 characterizes as hostile assaults on Vietnam. One of the centerpieces of PM Nguyen Tan Dung's 2008 visit to Washington was an agreement to boost educational cooperation, in particular by encouraging U.S. universities to establish a presence in Vietnam, and DPM Nhan (a Fulbright alum) is currently in the United States on a high-profile visit to drum up U.S. support. In this light, the document represents an attack by the CPV's most conservative wing, represented by the Commission on Ideology and Propaganda, on what hard liners such as To Huy Rua perceive as the "dangerous excesses" of reform. Ideology aside, though, it is equally a reflection of the growing divide within the Party between those involved in the day-to-day functioning of government (PM Dung and those around him) and the traditional centers of influence in the CPV Commissions (headed by CPV Secretariat Chair Sang) who resent Dung's efforts to consolidate power through the Office of Government, the ministries, and control over key state-owned enterprises.

¶9. (C) This interpretation is not inconsistent with the fact that the Decree was issued as an official product of the Central Committee. For a document of this type, the approval process goes directly from Rua's commission to the Secretariat of the Central

Committee headed by PM Dung's primary competitor for the position of General Secretary in 2011, Truong Tan Sang (ref C). At the end of the day, there is not much that separates Dung and Sang in terms of ideology or their approach to the United States -- both are economic pragmatists, are unsympathetic to political dissent, and favor incremental advances in bilateral relations with the United States. But they sit on opposite sides of the isle, so to speak. And just as bauxite emerged as a proxy for internal Party wrangling (ref D), so too can ideological documents such as 34-Ct/CW be used as non-ideological political cudgels.

CONSEQUENCES HARD TO PIN DOWN

¶10. (C) Decision 34 is a formal CPV document that, in principle, provides binding guidance for CPV members. However, the guidance is vague and -- as with all edicts of this sort -- subject to "interpretation" by Party cells in the ministries and by CPV functionaries at the provincial and local level. Within the Ministry of Justice, for example, the decree was slapped up on a bulletin board and was covered in a rather cursory fashion as a single item among several in internal Party meetings. The Decree's effects are also likely to vary widely at the provincial and local levels. More hidebound officials are likely to take Decision 34 as explicit sanction for the type of actions they would take anyway, while progressive officials such as in Binh Duong Province and Danang (ref E) will pay lip service to Decision 34 and continue to engage us as before. It is at the margins -- with officials who are undecided or politically insecure -- that Decision 34 is likely to have its most negative consequences as authorities err on the side of caution. The fact, for example, that private university projects are having difficulty despite support from PM Dung and DPM/Minister of Education Nhan suggests that lower-level officials may be wary of facilitating projects, even if they were sanctioned in general terms by top GVN officials. Similarly, Decision 34 puts into perspective frustrations that we have had implementing the International Visitor (IV) and Humphrey Fellows programs, ConGen

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HCMC's speaker program for college students, and a training on reporting on financial markets.

COMMENT

¶11. (C) While the language in Decision 34 is exasperating, we should not attribute our frustrations in staging public outreach programs and moving forward on governance projects to this document alone. These frustrations have been around for years and tend to ebb and flow over time. Decision 34 reflects the mindset of CPV's most conservative wing. It is difficult to discern precisely the influence this thinking has on the Party cadre or state bureaucracy charged with carrying out the U.S.-Vietnam relationship. That said, Decision 34 is important as a reminder that there remains a powerful bloc within the Party, and with whom we deal much less frequently, that actively opposes deepening engagement. While we should not ignore Decision 34, we should also not overreact. And, in fact, beneath the inflammatory rhetoric the authors of Decision 34 have a point. While the USG is not plotting a "color revolution" in Vietnam, we do promote more democratic governance, as well as increased respect for what the authors of Document 34 deride as "Western-style human rights." In this respect, Decision 34 can be viewed as evidence that hard-line elements agree with us that good governance and rule of law will, in the long term, lead to fundamental political change.

¶12. (U) This cable was drafted by ConGen HCMC and coordinated with Embassy Hanoi.
Palmer